

Merima Omeragić  
[merima.omeragic@unsa.ba](mailto:merima.omeragic@unsa.ba)  
University of Sarajevo  
Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies “Prof. Dr Zdravko Grebo”

## **The Post-Yugoslav (Feminist) Literary Continent or Literary Theoretical Heterotopia as a Powerful Alternative Voice**

*From Post-Yugoslavia to the Female Continent: A Feminist Reading of Post-Yugoslav Literature* / Tijana Matijević. – Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020 – 274 pp. – ISBN Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-5209-3, PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-5209-7.

Aiming to set challenges in the area of post-Yugoslav literatures, Tijana Matijević's study *From Post-Yugoslavia to the Female Continent: A Feminist Reading of Post-Yugoslav Literature* reconstructs the culturological field of a shared past that is represented in literary works about the recent wars in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. The book was published on the basis of a doctoral dissertation and in accordance with the logic of earlier studies, so it significantly expands the area previously researched by Katja Kobolt; in part by Jelena Petrović; and, in the context of national canons, by Emilija Kovač, Ajla Demiragić and Tatjana Jovanović. Based on the idea that post-Yugoslav literature may be studied as a separate field, Matijević identified new meanings in the domain of consideration about the continuity of the past, but also in the domain of the ties between the central notions of melancholy and literary melancholy. By means of a careful reading of marginalised texts, a map was made and a scientific framework was created, which in itself is an umbrella discourse. By placing literary texts into a transnational context, a dialogue between different texts was initiated. The importance of integrating separate, individual literatures is increased in favour of generating a Yugoslav cultural, specifically literary, space.

In the introductory part, not only does Matijević study the ethical effects of the dissolution of "Yugoslavia and [of] what emerges on its ruins" (Matijević 2020: 8), but she also constructs the space of a utopian feminist continent. Within the said space, what she places at the centre of attention is a tie between *post-* and Yugoslav feminist practices with the aim of "identifying the links between patriarchy, nationalism and war (Matijević 2020: 25), and

another thing that is placed at the centre of attention is consideration about the impact on the creation of an alternative space. The study is essentially two-dimensional, on the one hand, and its function is to usurp the perception of the dominant narratives, primarily those of history and literature, while, on the other hand, the study generates alternative fields, discourses and theories, and it insists on the continuity of women's literary tradition and writing. The scientific construct is made on the basis of understanding "women's writing as the practice of writing [which] is outside the masculinist and patriarchal economy of discourse (Matijević 2020: 9). The other dimension of the scientific framework consists in the interpretation of literary practices of writing about the post-Yugoslav as about social and cultural hierarchies which "bring to light the past of socialist Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav wars" (Matijević 2020: 10). The arguments that confirm and arise from this framework, also in the opposite, inductive-deductive, sense, are set forth in the analysis of extracanonical literary texts.

This study is divided into three central chapters. The scientific emphasis is on the central consideration and on well-argued, that is, profound analysis of literary texts. The research corpus includes the fictional works of the following women authors: Ildiko Lovas, Tanja Stupar Trifunović, Tea Tulić, Ivana Simić Bodrožić, Snežana Andrejević, Luka Benavac, Olja Savičević Ivanišević, and Slobodan Tišma. Apart from providing interesting interpretations of individual works of fiction, the study also contributes to the idea of making a picture of post-Yugoslav literature in the sense that it provides a large number of references, that it skilfully uses thematic, genre-related and productive links, and that it gives a gradual argumentation of its thesis.

The central chapter, entitled "Women's Writing and Critical Nostalgia on Ildiko Lovas' Fiction", with a hypothesis on critical nostalgia, begins with the interpretation of the books of short fiction *Via del Corso*, *Stvarni konobar (The Real Waiter)*, and *Zlatna priča (The Golden Story)* as books in which the concept of nostalgia in women's writing is re-evaluated. In contrast to *Stvarni konobar* and *Zlatna priča* as metaphorised by means of a massive destruction of books and dehumanisation of women (as it is presumed, on the Island of Saint Grgur – a labour camp for women), *Via del Corso* re-evaluates the power of overcoming of the Yugoslav chronotope. Apart from the fact that this hypothesis identifies taboo topics, its potential is also reflected in the sense that it proved the silenced status of women. Within such a concept, Matijević recognises and emphasises the significance of writing about/analysing experienced aggression, misogyny, the female body and lesbian love, with the aim of destabilising double (artistic and scientific) censorship. In other words, what is entailed here is a criticism in the form of "how women were excluded not only from the political discourse [on the suffering

under communists after the Second World War], but also from the cultural reproduction" (Matijević 2020: 57). In accordance with that, the study of this literary topic imposed itself as an important link not only in shedding light on the dark places of Yugoslav past and the representation thereof in literature, but also in striving to contribute to the reconstruction of our female literary tradition.

In her chapter "Post-Yugoslav *Écriture féminine*", Tijana Matijević reflects on the concept of women's writing using the structure of masculinity, nationalism and wars, as well as the war confiscation of bodies and female voices. Within the said hypothesis, the following voices of resistance are analysed – those of Tanja Stupar Trifunović, Tea Tulić, and Ivana Bodrožić. Tanja Stupar Trifunović's *Sat u majčinoj sobi* (*The Clock in the Mother's Room*) and Tea Tulić's *Kose posvuda* (*Hair is Everywhere*) are analysed with a focus on the loss of the mother figure. Within this motive there is a precise elaboration and interpretation of the elements of facing oppression, roles, the pre-symbolic maternal, but also the task of building a matrilineal order. Unlike the aforesaid women writers, Ivana Bodrožić's narration is determined by the past and the order in which a girl is growing up with a trauma caused by the loss of her father in the war. In that context, the author of this study shows that Ivana Bodrožić's writing is established as a reflection of "the abnormality of living in an atrocious war-time reality" (Matijević 2020: 99), but also as a mode of her answer to the relevance of male writing and women's exclusion. Using the examples of her selected women writers, Matijević provides a significant insight into their specificity and, more broadly, into the character of the works of literature written by women on the topic of wars. With the aim of strengthening her basis for interpretation, the author produced a sui generis outline of post/Yugoslav women's writing, also inserting into the said field the reviews of the books *Božanska dječica* (*Divine Little Children*) by Tatjana Gromača, *Rod avetnjaka* (*The Gender of Tarsius*) by Slađana Bukovac, *Da bog da te majka rodila* (*I Wish You Would Be Born by Your Mother*) by Vedrana Rudan, and *Arzamas* by Ivana Dimić. By means of the addition of several authors into this field, the field of women's writing did not only become expanded but a difference was also emphasised between the female literary discourse and the one that (along the lines of masculinity) may become (or remain) dominant.

The study's chapter "The Other Writing: Atonement and Female Authorship in Snežana Andrejević's and Luka Bekavac's Fiction" is grounded on researching the otherness of the position of writing and narration from the perspective of the oppressed. Although the respective works of Snežana Andrejević and Luka Bekavac share the same literary identity, particularly in the domain of the representation of the time of war, memories, feminist projections and

subjects, the reception of the works of these two women authors depends on their respective positions in culture. Taking the writer's genderness into consideration, a challenging perspective is introduced which is concerned with the ambivalence of post-Yugoslav literature. The contemporary two-sidedness can be briefly explained as "the reoccurring situation of privileging the male authorship" (Matijević 2020: 117). In this case, the identified phenomenon functions at the level of the unfamiliarity of the novel and the woman writer, and at the level of the author's identity as a familiar, recognised and prominent researcher and literary figure. The goal of Tijana Matijević's research is established in the direction of revealing and displaying "blind spots in reception and the overall literary discourse in which two comparable writings and their authors have two parallel literary lives (Matijević 2020: 118).

The scientific basis for the 5th and 6th chapter is the act of facing the concepts of the past and literary historiographies. That is why the author of this study justly asks herself: "What to Do With the Past? Feminist Literary Historiographies". Separate interpretations of Olja Savičević Ivančević's *Zbogom, kauboju (Adio, Cowboy)* and Slobodan Tišma's *Bernardova soba (Bernard's Room)* allow for perceiving the potential of a different conception of "utopian territories which do bear a 'trace' of the inaccessible past, but on the whole in fact enable overcoming of the 'past' narrative" (Matijević 2020: 151). Bringing Olja Savičević Ivančević and Slobodan Tišma to the same theoretical plain showed different literary approaches to the analysis of the past. So, while Slobodan Tišma holds on to an avant-garde utopia, Olja Savičević Ivančević communicates with the sphere of the feminist post-Yugoslav, because she "tells a story about the (better) past of the socialist Yugoslavia [...] and [the] dissolution and refraction by and inside the sex/gender issues" (Matijević 2020: 154).

The significance of this study is reflected in the fact that it brings a different and new portrait of post-Yugoslav literature, one that is different from the official, recognised and recommended one. In briefest terms, with her selection of scientific apparatus and methodology, as well as corpus, the author forms a "female continent within post-Yugoslav literature" (Matijević 2020: 251), based on the idea of heterogeneity. This heterogeneity is grounded on the criticism of the order and lawfulness of the masculinist literary canon. Being immanently transnational in character, the heterogeneous post-Yugoslav literary continent includes writing of the other and of what is different. At the theoretical level, what this study includes is a continent grounded in a broadened understanding of women's writing, an evaluation of relations between war history and the present, and phenomena of the writing of identities and bodies. Tijana Matijević creates the needed knowledge and links, she also creates crossroads, uses innovative methods and theories, or, as she sums it up herself, she strives to

create a new approach that will co-exist with the dominant approach, rather than striving to create "a discriminatory, perfectionist utopia" (Matijević 2020: 255).

Preveo Goran Petrović

**Merima Omeragić**

[merima.omeragic@unsa.ba](mailto:merima.omeragic@unsa.ba)

Univerzitet u Sarajevu

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